

INDUSTRY ALERT

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Fatality

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ATV operator suffers fatal head injury after being thrown from his vehicle

What happened?

A 21-year-old silviculture worker was using a four-wheel all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and trailer to pick up left-over planting materials in a completed block. He was an experienced, qualified ATV operator. He was working alone but had radio and cell phone communications with his supervisor, whom he had spoken to before starting the clean-up job. As he was travelling with the empty trailer along one of the block roads, he encountered an on-coming pick-up truck on a blind left-hand curve. He had to swerve to the right to avoid a collision. He missed the truck but wasn't able to keep the ATV and trailer on the road. As the ATV went off the road, it travelled over a small berm made by the grader and into a slight depression on the other side. The bump apparently caused the operator to fall off the ATV and strike his head on the trailer. He died of his injuries.

Why did it happen?

The ATV operator was not wearing a helmet. An Alberta study of 64 ATV-related deaths in that province between 2002 and 2006 found that 66% of those killed were not wearing a helmet. Of the ATV operators who died as a result of a head injury, 83% were not wearing a helmet.

How can it be prevented?

When an ATV operator doesn't take basic safety precautions such as wearing a helmet, a seemingly minor mishap can have devastating consequences. The typical hazards associated with ATV use become considerably more severe when an ATV is being driven on a resource road where conditions and traffic are often unpredictable. ATVs weigh several hundred pounds, can travel very fast and are tippy, so they must be driven with caution and good judgement at all times. ATVs pulling trailers are heavier and even trickier to control.

An ATV training program for all drivers is a necessary first step. There are several good training providers available, but the training should meet the Canada Safety Council (CSC) ATV training requirements. ATV operators should also be oriented in the company safe operating procedures for ATVs.

Driving at appropriate speeds at all times is an essential element of ATV safety. Ensuring proper personal protective equipment is also critical. A proper-fitting CSA-approved helmet, eye protection, long pants, proper boots, gloves, and high-visibility clothing go a long way to limit any potential injury.

The most important part of ensuring employees operate ATVs safely is to evaluate their ability to use safe procedures consistently. Supervisors should also monitor workers' operation of ATVs on a regular basis and deal promptly with safety lapses such as not wearing a helmet before they lead to a tragedy such as this incident.

OFSWA has a "Talking Safety" topic on safe ATV use that can be downloaded from our website for use in a brief safety meeting. For more information on ATV safety, talk to your local OFSWA Consultant Trainer.

www.ofswa.on.ca



Although the description of circumstances arises from an actual situation, this Industry Alert does not reflect the final analysis of the situation, nor is it meant to assign blame on the part of any person or member firm. For further information, contact OFSWA at 705-474-7233. For details on Ministry of Labour prosecutions regarding recent health and safety incidents in Ontario workplaces, visit www.labour.gov.on.ca and click on "News Releases".